

AL-KHIDR ﷺ:

Keeping the Company
of Those Who See

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Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Sura al Fatiha

AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L-ABSĀR.

ALLĀHUMMA ThABIT QULŪBANA °ALA SIRĀTIKA-L-QAWĪM,

WA-J°ALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHĪN,

WA ṢALLI °ALA-Sh-ShAFI°I-L-HABĪB,

RAḤMATIL-°ĀLAMĪN,

WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN, WA MARSĀ-L-°ĀRIFĪN

Praise be to Allah ﷻ, the turner of the hearts and sight.
O Allah ﷻ, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,
and make us face You in our way,
and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,
the mercy of all the worlds,
the lighthouse of the survivors, the harbor of the knowers.

YĀ MAWJŪDAN °INDA-Sh-ShADĀĀ'IDI

YĀ KhAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUN°I

YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YA'JILUQDI ḤĀJATĪ

BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀḤIMĪN.

SUBḤĀNAKA °ALĀ ḤILMIKA BA°DA °ILMIK.

SUBḤĀNAKA °ALĀ °AFWIKA BA°DA QUDRATIK

O Existent One, O Thou who are Present in all difficulties.
O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle making.
O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,
With Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the Mercifuls.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy forgiveness, after Thy Power.

INTRODUCTION

This is a series about journeying, and it is really, truly only for a few. If you are not so motivated, then you will hear about it, read about it, and forget about it. This is a series that references my *duruus* over forty years, because it is about the outer and the inner. Forty years, at least in my time of teaching, is hardly enough time to begin to even touch on the subjects.

The fount of knowledge flows from the *ghayb* through certain channels, and to drink from that spring of life, you have to qualify. To qualify, one has to choose the *naʿafil*, to do what is *not* required, what is beyond requirement. It is a place where few see, those of us in *dunya*. Few of us have seen or see; and even fewer see in the *baatīn*. One has to be guided inwardly to it. So, we can do our best; but surely, those who cannot be guided, cannot be guided; and only those who can be guided by Allah ﷻ will be guided by Allah ﷻ. We have to choose to be of those. We have to remember that this is a choice to be made every moment of the day – eventually; continuously and constantly – to remember to remember. So many of the subjects you will hear today you have heard before, many of the admonitions, but framed in the story of whatever we know, or don't know, or cannot know about Al-Khidr عليه السلام.

Allah ﷻ said in the Holy Qur'an, in Surah al-An'am:

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِيحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ
وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظِلْمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا
رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

WA °IN̄DAHU MAFĀTĪHU-L-GhAYBI LĀ
YA°LAMUHĀ ILLĀ HUWA WA YA°LAMU MĀ FI-L-
BARRI WA-L-BAHRI WA MĀ TASQUTU MINW-WA
RAQATIN ILLĀ YA°LAMUHĀ WA LĀ HABBATIN FĪ
DhULUMĀTI-L-'ARDI WA LĀ RAT^aBIÑW-WALĀ
YĀBISIN ILLĀ FĪ KITĀBIM-MUBĪN.

And with Him are the keys of the Unseen; no one knows [them] but He. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. And not a leaf falls but He knows it. And there is neither a seed in the deep darkness of the earth nor a thing green or withered but it is in a Clear Book. [6:59]

Therefore, we say that the knowledge of all things, the known and the unknown, belongs to Allah ﷻ. At the same time, He has established that there are those to whom special knowledge is given: faithful believers, messengers, saints, *shuyukh*.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ وَالشَّهَدَاءُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ هُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ وَنُورُهُمْ ...

WA-LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ BI-LLĀHI WA RUSULIH
ULĀĀ'IKA HUMU-S-ṢIDDĪQŪNA WA-SH-
SHUHADĀĀ'U ʾINĀDA RABBIHIM LAHUM
AJ^āRUHUM WA NŪRUHUM...

Those who faithfully believe in Allah and His messengers—they are the sincere truthful ones, and the martyrs, with their Lord—for them is their reward and their light... [57:19]

To those who faithfully believe, Allah ﷻ gives some special knowledge of the Unseen. These people exist throughout history as messengers, as guides, seen and unseen by us, past and present, and among us. These unseen friends and helpers of Allah ﷻ are recognized in Qur'an and Hadith, and we are guided to call out to them for help. This is seen in the example of Musa عليه السلام in Surah al-Qasas with the word *istaghaatha*, “**He asked for help**” (not for knowledge only) (28:15); and by Dhu-l-Qarnayn using the term *dīnūnī*, “**Help me**” in Surah al-Kahf (18:95), which is the same root as *nastāʿeen*, “**We turn for help**” in Surah al-Fatihah. Further proofs from the Sunnah for calling out to an invisible helper in a situation of need can be found in Hadith:

Al-Bukhari narrates in his Sahih that our Hajar ؑ, when she was running in search of water between Safwa and Marwa, heard a voice and called out: "O You Whose voice You have made me hear! If there is a ghanth (help/helper) with You, then help me!" And an angel appeared at the spot of the spring of Zamzam.

In a *hadith*, al-Bayhaqi narrates on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that the Prophet ﷺ said:

Allah has angels on the earth—other than the [two] record-keepers—who keep a record [even] of the leaves that fall on the ground. Therefore, if one of you is crippled in a deserted land where no one is in sight, let him cry out: "Help, O servants of Allah, may Allah have mercy on you!" Verily he shall be helped, if Allah wills.

So we see that there are those servants of Allah ﷻ, certain people and angels who are there to help and guide us, those who are given the sight, and the hearing, and the ability to assist others. Shah Waliyullah of Delhi ؒ wrote, "*Good and virtuous spirits get mixed up with groups of Angels, and help with the human being in their needs.*" Who are these people? They are the people who Allah ﷻ describes in the *hadith qudsi*:

My servant draws near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him.

When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks.

Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it... (Narrated by Abu Huraira in Bukhari, vol 8, hadith 509).

Those who are brought near to Allah ﷻ are hearing what others do not hear, and seeing what others do not see. The friends of Allah ﷻ are those people who understand what it means when Allah ﷻ gives the power to hear, and the vision to see. We are gathered here today to speak about one of the greatest of these great servants of Allah ﷻ, someone known by many names, a hand of guidance that can be found in the pages of many spiritual traditions: Al-Khidr ؑ, the Green One.

WHO IS THE GREEN ONE?

Who is Al-Khidr ؑ? We really don't know. Qur'anic commentators have related several opinions with regard to the status of Khidr ؑ. Some say he is one of the prophets; others refer to him simply as an angel who functions as a guide to those who seek. There are yet others who argue that he is a *wali* or saint, one whom Allah ﷻ has taken as a friend, who has this nearness/*nisbah*, a very cordial relationship. Literally, Al-Khidr ؑ means, "green one," which represents what is fresh and new and eternal, the source of life. There are many stories about how he acquired that appellation. It also might be related to Al-Khidr ؑ disappearing in the green landscape, after departing from Musa ؑ in the story – he just merged into the green landscape. Some people say that Khidr ؑ symbolically represents the *fajeer* in the wilderness, travelling where he is most needed, meeting the people who were also wanderers, sojourners; people who were lost (not just geographically lost); people who were troubled, and those who call out for help. In fact, some would say that when you call out "*al ganth!*" that is the way to summon him.

Of course, Khidr ؑ appears in Qur'an, and those commentators who have thought of Khidr ؑ as a prophet have mainly argued this on the basis of the Qur'anic reference to him as *rahma* in Surah al-Kahf:

**FA-WAJADĀ ‘ABĀDAM-MIN ‘IBĀDINĀ ĀTAYNĀHU
RAHMATAM-MIN ‘İNDINĀ WA ‘ALLAMNĀHU
MIL-LADUNNĀ ‘İLMĀ.**

They found one of Our worshippers to whom We had given Mercy from Our Self, and We had taught him Knowledge directly from Our Presence. [18:65]

We can only try to guess what that means. This *ayat* characterizes Al-Khidr ؑ with language usually applied to the prophets. Additionally, this *ayat* tell us the Khidr ؑ was taught knowledge of the Unseen directly by Allah ﷻ. The source of his knowledge is therefore beyond question. He has Divine knowledge, and that knowledge comes to very few. Khidr ؑ is one of the four prophets whom the Islamic tradition recognizes as being “alive” or “immortal,” the other three being Idris (Enoch), Ilyas (Elias), and ‘Isa (Jesus)—peace be on all of them. Khidr ؑ is immortal because he drank from the water of life. There are some who have asserted that this Khidr ؑ is the same person as Elijah. He is also identified with St. George of the Christian tradition. And there is a link here between Khidr ؑ and the classical Jewish legend of the “Wandering Jew.” But who he is, is less important than what he does, and what he does for us.

Large amounts of detail can be found pertaining to his name, genealogy, appearance, origin, and status in the compilations of Muslim commentators and historians since the beginning of Islamic scholarship. Most of this literature exists either in connection with the commentary of Surah Al-Kahf, or it is linked with the tales of the prophets (*Qisas al-Anbiya*). One writer offers the following summary of the significance of Al-Khidr ؑ in the Sufi tradition:

Khidr ؑ is associated with the water of life. Since he drank the water of immortality, he is described as the one who has found the source of life. He is the mysterious guide and immortal saint. Sometimes the mystics would meet him on their journeys. He would inspire them, answer their questions, rescue them from danger, and, in special cases, invest them with the kbirqa, which was accepted as valid in the tradition of Sufi initiation.

In Sufic tradition, Khidr ؑ has come to be known as one of the *afrād*, those “who receive illumination direct from God without human mediation.” He is the hidden initiator of those who walk the

mystical path, like some of those from the Uwaisi *Tareeqah*. Uwaisis are those who “*enter the mystical path without being initiated by a living master.*” Instead, they begin their mystical journey either by following the guiding light of the teachings of the earlier masters, or by being “*initiated by the mysterious prophet-saint, Khidr ؑ.*” Through this way come several Sufi Orders, which claim initiation through Khidr ؑ and consider him their master. It has become yet another possible way of initiation through “*a source other than a human master.*” Besides the Uwaisi, history records that Ibn ‘Arabi ؑ, the great mystical giant from Islamic Spain, claimed to have received the *khirqah* from Khidr ؑ (such a *khirqah* is usually blue-green). Khidr ؑ had thus come to symbolize “the third path” to the knowledge of God, purely and constantly supernatural, giving access to the Divine mystery (*ghayb*) itself. In the writings of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, Khidr rules over “the Men of the Unseen” (*rijaal al-ghayb*)—the exalted saints and angels.

Khidr ؑ is also claimed by and included among what in the classical Sufism are called the *abdāl* (those who take turns), or the “saints” (*amlīyaa*) of Islam. In a Divinely instituted hierarchy of such saints, Khidr ؑ holds the rank of their spiritual head. They are called *abdāl* due to their role of becoming a “substitute” for Khidr ؑ and taking turns in “*helping in his mission of assisting and saving good men and women in danger and distress.*”¹ But let’s look at it in a slightly different way. Khidr ؑ is looked upon as an individual who can transcend time and space, and can give you the answers and the direction not only that you need in the moment but for the future. However, there is a caveat: first you must find him; you must identify him. In addition to the particular story of Musa ؑ and Khidr ؑ in Surah al-Kahf, which I will return to and speak about in more depth, there are many other stories and accounts of Al-Khidr ؑ.

Khidr ؑ is sometimes called “the teacher of prophets.” It is said that the only prophet who Khidr ؑ did not teach is Prophet

¹ Irfan Omar “*Khidr in the Islamic Tradition.*” Duncan Black MacDonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut <http://www.khidr.org/khidr.htm>

Muhammad ﷺ, but that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Khidr ؑ met a few times. According to Imam Ali ؑ, Al-Khidr ؑ came to visit the Prophet ﷺ who described him with these words: “*He could be heard, but could not be seen in person.*” He used the word “*batif*.” Al Khidr ؑ is also said to have appeared at the Prophet’s ﷺ funeral, as related by Ibn al-Jazar as follows, “*A powerful-looking handsome man with a white beard came leaping over the back of the people till he reached where the sacred body ﷺ lay. Weeping bitterly, he turned toward the Companions and paid his condolences. Abu Bakr ؓ and ‘Ali ؓ said that he was Khidr.*” It is significant that the ones to identify him were these two, as they are the only two *Sahaabah* who are ascribed to *baatini* knowledge (knowledge of the Unseen). And all Sufi *silsila* derive from them. This hidden knowledge is not learned; it is transmitted to others, as it was transmitted by Allah to the very few. Imam Ali ؑ also said, “*Every year on the day of Arafat, Jibreel Mikehail, Israfil, and Al-Khidr ؑ meet on Arafat and praise Allah. Then they separate and do not meet again until the next such day.*”

IN SEARCH OF THE TEACHER

In Surah al-Kahf, we find the story of Musa ؑ and Khidr ؑ. There is so much symbolism in this story that we cannot fully cover it, but know that such a story, pregnant with meaning, is a hint at the meaning that can be found in every occurrence in our day-to-day life. There is mention of the fish, which is the symbol of knowledge; water, which is the symbol of life; the sea, which is the symbol of limitlessness and immensity and vastness; the relationship between *murshid* and *mureed*, or trust and submission; the journey, which represents the inner journey of the seeker for truth. This is just to mention a few of the possible inner meanings. Because the Arabic language is so rich, every level of the words being used can be endlessly explored on our journey. The story shows that knowledge comes alive only after someone accomplishes or fulfills the guidance they were given. Knowledge doesn't come free; we have to pay for it by attentiveness, change, and sustaining our purpose – hardly an easy task. Just think about a change you just made, or one you are contemplating: a job, a relationship, a place, an attitude, an idea. Think about how difficult it is. What do you put yourself through? How many opinions did you get?

The story of Musa ﷺ and Al-Khidr ﷺ begins with Musa ﷺ traveling in search of Khidr ﷺ. But what inspired that search for knowledge? The Prophet Musa ﷺ was already the leader of his people; yet he becomes a student, a seeker of greater knowledge on a journey that humbles and challenges him. There is another story that may offer other insight into the cause of his search.

Musa got up one day to deliver a speech before the Children of Israel and he was asked,

“Who is the most learned person among the people?”

Musa replied, “I am.” Allah rebuked him because he did not refer the knowledge to Allah. So Allah revealed to him:

“At the junction of the two seas there is a servant of Ours who is more learned than you.”

Musa asked, “O my Lord, how can I meet him?” Allah said, “Take a fish, and put it in a vessel, and then set out; and where you lose the fish, you will find him.”

And so Musa ﷺ begins his search for his teacher.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّىٰ أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ
حُقُبًا

WA'IDh QĀLA MŪSĀ LIFATĀHU LĀ AB^āRAHU
HATTĀ AB^āLUGhA MAJ^āMA^cA-L-BAH^uRAYNI AW
AMDIYA HUQUBĀ

And [remember] when [in the course of his travels] Musa said to his servant boy, “I won’t stop traveling until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if I have to go on for ages.” [18:60]

Musa ﷺ is willing to travel as long and as far as it takes² to find the one whose wisdom is greater than his. Some say the phrase “go on for ages” meant “a year” in the dialect of the place. Abdullah ibn Amr said it meant 80 years, and Mujahid said 70 years. Ibn Abbas said it meant lifetimes. “I am seeking the meeting place of the two seas,” is symbolic of the place where perfect knowledge exists, the place where esoteric knowledge and exoteric knowledge meet. Musa ﷺ represents the exoteric knowledge, and Khidr ﷺ the esoteric knowledge. So the meeting of the two oceans was both literal and symbolic.

In order to find this place, Musa ﷺ took a fish, put it in a vessel and set out, along with his boy-servant Yusha bin Nun ﷺ. Yusha himself is considered a prophet, known as Joshua in the Torah. He was the great grandson of the Prophet Yusuf ﷺ. He traveled with Musa ﷺ for 40 years in the desert and, when Musa ﷺ died, it was Yusha ﷺ who led the Bani Israel over the River Jordan and into Jericho. Musa ﷺ and his companion Yusha ﷺ traveled until they reached the junction of the two seas, where there was a spring called ‘*Ayn al Hayat* (Spring of Life). They paused to sleep there. The fish felt the drops of that water or mist, and it came back to life. It was in a vessel carried by Yusha ﷺ. As it jumped out of that vessel towards the sea, Yusha ﷺ woke up and saw that it swam through the water, leaving a channel behind it. It went as if through a tunnel in the water just like a tunnel on land. Ibn Abbas said that “*it left a trace as if it were a rock.*” The *majaaʒ* (tunnel) that is created (a metaphor for moving from *fanaa’* to *baqaa’*) by the meeting of two worlds represents the simultaneity in the universe beyond time and space. It is not just a tunnel that goes from here to there; you are here and there at the same time. It’s very quantum physics. This is a place beyond time and space. Again, in Surah al-Kahf:

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا

² Some of the scholars of Arabic said that *Huqub* (referring to “go on for ages”) means a year in the dialect of the Qays and then he narrated that Abdullah bin ‘Amr said it means 80 years and Mujahid said “seventy years” and Ali bin Abi Talhah said that ibn Abbas said it meant a lifetime.

FA-LAMMĀ BALAGhĀ MAJ^āMA^cA BAYNIHIMĀ
 NASIYĀ H^UTAHUMĀ FA-T^TAKhADhA SABĪLAHU
 FI-L-BAH^URI SARABĀ

And when they reached the point where the two met,
 they forgot [about] their fish, and it took its course into
 the sea, boring [as if through a tunnel]. [18:61]

When Musa ﷺ got up, his companion forgot to tell him about the
 fish, and so they carried on their journey during the rest of the day
 and the whole night. The next morning Musa ﷺ said to his boy-
 servant,

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِفَتَاهُ آتِنَا غَدَاءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا

FA-LAMMĀ JĀWAZĀ QĀLA LIFATĀHU ĀTINĀ
 GhADĀA'ANĀ LAQAD^ā LAQĪNĀ MIÑ SAFARINĀ
 HĀDhĀ NAṢABĀ

Bring us our morning meal; truly, we have suffered
 much fatigue in this, our journey. [18:62]

His boy-servant then said to him,

أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْخُبُوتَ وَمَا أَنْسَانِيهِ إِلَّا
 الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا

ARĀYTA IDh AWAYNĀ ILĀ-S-SAKhRATI FA'INNĪ
 NASĪTU-L-H^UTA WA MĀ AÑSĀNĪHU ILLĀ-SH-
 SHAYTĀNU AN ADhKURAHU WA-T^TAKhADhA
 SABĪLAHU FI-L-BAH^URI ^cAJABĀ

Do you remember when we betook ourselves to the rock;
 I indeed forgot the fish. None but Shaytan made me
 forget to remember it. It took its course into the sea in a
 strange way. [18:63]

Musa ﷺ said, **“That is where we have been seeking. So they went back retracing their footsteps”** [18:64] until they reached the rock. There they found a man covered with a garment. Why did Musa initially pass by the destination? Why did they forget? Remember Musa ﷺ said, **“...Truly we are tired in this [stage] of our journey.”** [18:62] This is a classic example of what happens when inertia sets in. I think we have all experienced physical and spiritual inertia at some point in our lives. We all know what happens when we get tired or become inattentive. We also become defensive, and we make statements like, “Why didn’t you tell me that?” “I didn’t think it was important,” or “Oh, didn’t I tell you that? I thought I told you that,” or “I’m sorry. I forgot.” Immediately we defend our state. We miss the cues, the hints of purpose (*isharaat*). We don’t realize the importance of the linkages, the vastness of space that surrounds the little amount of matter, the vastness of the Unseen, which supports the limited thing we call life, this physical world we call ‘the seen’. We tend to make assumptions, cognitively or unconsciously. This is indeed part of the human condition. Adam ﷺ assumes he heard the warning of Allah ﷻ vis a vis Shaytan. Ibrahim ﷺ perhaps assumes all will be harmonious with Saara and Hagar. Nuh ﷺ questions Allah’s ﷻ actions vis a vis his son. Sidna Musa ﷺ, as other prophets before and after him, makes certain assumptions, too, and commits certain wrongs.

THE GIVING OF BAY‘AT

When Musa ﷺ finally finds Khidr ﷺ, he asks to follow him and become his student. We don’t know if he was there when Musa ﷺ was there the first time, and Musa ﷺ just didn’t see him, or if he showed up conveniently when they returned. Obviously, he had knowledge that they were not going to be there the first time they stopped, or they wouldn’t see him. For people of *tareeqah*, this is often seen as the first example of the giving of *bay‘at*, and one of several places in Qur’an that exemplifies and supports this practice. We can see the importance of this practice from the very existence of Al-Khidr ﷺ, from his role in the story, and from that fact that even the prophets of Allah ﷻ sought out a teacher (in the form of Al-Khidr ﷺ) to facilitate understanding of the Unseen and refinement of their character.

Having met a true *murshid*, Musa ﷺ implores him to accept himself as his disciple (*mureed*) and teach him the knowledge of Higher Spiritual Truths, which would lead him to the Supreme Goal. Musa ﷺ says, **“May I follow you on condition that you teach me out of what you have been given of right guidance?”** [18:66] We know the story, but we have to understand some of the little nuances of it. Aware of the reality of such *bay'at*, and the fact that Spiritual Knowledge can and often does confuse the minds of the seekers, the Murshid (Al-Khidr ﷺ) warns the Seeker that it is a difficult path on which he embarks. He will see and experience many mysterious things, and may neither be able to bear them calmly nor patiently. Al-Khidr ﷺ says, **“Surely you will not be patient with me. For how can you have patience with that which your knowledge cannot encompass?”** [18:66-68]

Khidr ﷺ is telling the Prophet Musa ﷺ directly that he does not understand the full meaning of the request he is making. Have we not all experienced that? Certainly, I did not know the full meaning of the request I was making when I gave my hand to my Shaykh. But the Seeker promises to follow and obey his Master under any circumstance. **“Allah willing, you will find me patient: I will not disobey any order of yours,”** [18:69] says Musa ﷺ. Aha! How many times have we heard that, or even just implied? I guess in this case, you can say “take it with a grain of salted fish.” He says this with surety and sincerity. There is no doubt that he is sincere. There is no doubt that any of you are sincere, who have given your hand; yet, he is wrong about his own ability to be patient and obedient. But this assurance is not enough, and so the Master places a final condition before the Seeker that he should not question him about anything whatsoever, and the Seeker agrees to it. Now, if Khidr ﷺ has knowledge of the unseen world and what is going to happen, why does he allow him to continue? Because Musa ﷺ has to find out for himself about himself.

[Al-Khidr ﷺ] said, “If you would follow me, then ask me no questions about anything until I myself mention it to you.” [18:70]

A spiritual bond now binds them. As people of *tareeqah*, as seekers of Truth, as givers of *bay'at*, we try to refine our souls, our inner most souls. We strive to be in not only the company of our *shaykh* and our *shuyukh*, but also to realize that the blessing of being in *tareeqah* carries with it responsibility. That responsibility accrues to whoever has given *bay'at*, no matter what stage they are at, in their own spiritual development. We carry with us the trust of all the *amliyaa'u-Llaah* and the *ambiyaa'*, to whatever degree we know the hidden aspects and secrets of the unseen world, even if our knowledge is only to know that those secrets exist and we don't yet know them. We accept and understand this type of heritage and responsibility in many ways when it comes to the outer. You are the daughter or son of so-and-so. You are in the line of so-and-so. Everyone is familiar with this concept, but when it comes to *tareeqah*, it is equally serious. Wherever you go, knowingly or unknowingly, you represent that Order. You represent that *shaykh* and the people of *tareeqah*—all the people of *tareeqah*, no exceptions. This is a heavy responsibility and burden. It is based on a promise that you don't really understand what it means. You may never really understand what it means if you let the inertia set in.

THE TEACHINGS OF AL-KHIDR ﷺ

So Musa ﷺ is accepted as the student of Al-Khidr ﷺ and they set out walking along the shore, until a boat passed by and they asked the crew to let them go on board. The crew recognized Al-Khidr ﷺ and allowed them to go on board free of charge. They knew him as a friend of the poor and servant of Allah ﷻ. When they went on board, Musa ﷺ saw that Al-Khidr ﷺ had pulled out one of the planks of the ship. Musa ﷺ said to him, “These people gave us a free passage, yet you have broken their boat so that it is possible that the people will drown! Verily, you have done a terrible thing!” Al-Khidr ﷺ said, **“Did I not tell you, that you would not be able to have patience with me.”** [18:72] Musa ﷺ said, **“Do not take me to task for my forgetfulness, and don't be hard on my [by making] a difficulty in my case!”** [18:73] Have you ever been there? If you do that excessively, it's called passive-aggressive behavior. Shut the person up. Give an excuse until they raise their hands and say, “Okay, fine. I'm not going to say anymore.” Then a

bird came and sat on the edge of the boat, dipping its beak once or twice in the sea. Al-Khidr ﷺ said to Musa ﷺ, “*My knowledge and your knowledge, in comparison to Allah’s knowledge, is like what this bird has taken out of the sea.*” Now, he’s putting himself on the level with Musa ﷺ, compared to Allah ﷻ. Musa ﷺ had put him at a level higher than himself, because Allah ﷻ said he had knowledge of the Unseen, *rahmah*. Then they both disembarked from the boat, so we can assume that the damage Al-Khidr ﷺ did to the boat was just enough to allow it to sail to its home port or before it left; how else could they have survived?

Later, while they were walking on the shore, Al-Khidr ﷺ saw a boy playing with other boys. Al-Khidr ﷺ took hold of the boy’s head and killed him with his hands. Musa ﷺ said to him, **“Truly what you have done is terrible!”** [18:74], and Khidr ﷺ says, **“Didn’t I tell you that you would not have patience with me?”** [18:75] But Musa ﷺ assures him that next time will be different, **“If I question you about anything after this, then do not keep company with me...”** [18:76] So now, what is happening? Musa ﷺ is giving him the order that he was given by him previously. He was told that was the condition; and he is saying it now. Then they both proceeded until they came to the people of a town. They asked them for food but they refused to entertain them. These were not nice people. Outside of the town they found there a wall on the point of falling down. Al-Khidr ﷺ set it up straight with his own hands. Musa ﷺ said, “We came to these people, but they neither fed us nor received us as guests. **“If you had wished, surely, you could have taken wages for it!”** [18:77]

At each stage, Prophet Musa ﷺ asked questions and passes judgment, until after this third time, Al-Khidr ﷺ said, **“This is the parting between you and me. [But first] I will tell you the inner meaning of that which you could not bear with patience.”** [18:78] This is the parting between the esoteric and the exoteric. This is the parting between *zaman* and *waqt*. This is the point where the *barẓakh* is set, and you are where you are in the *barẓakh*. Nothing is going to change but by the Will of Allah ﷻ. And he goes on to explain the inner meanings:

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسَاكِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ
أَعْيَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا. وَأَمَّا الْعَلَامُ
فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا.

AMMĀ-S-SAFĪNATU FA-KĀNAT LIMASĀKĪNA
YAʿMALŪNA FI-L-BAHRI FA-ARAD^{tu} AN
AʿĪBAHĀ WA KĀNA WA RĀAʾAHUM MALIKUÑY-
YAʿKhUDhU KULLA SAFĪNATIN GhAṢBĀ.

WA AMMĀ-L-GhULĀMU FA-KĀNA ABAWĀHU
MUʾMINAYNI FA-KhASHĪNĀ AÑY-
YURHIQAHUMĀ TUGhYĀNANĀW-WA KUFRĀ.

As for the boat, it belonged to poor people working in the sea. I wished to damage it as there was a king coming after them who seized every [sound] boat by force.

And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared he would bring bitter grief on them by his wickedness and disbelief. [18:79-80]

Ibn ʿAbbas narrated from Ubayy bin Kaʿb that the Prophet ﷺ said about this:

The boy Al-Khidr killed was destined to be a disbeliever from the day he was created.

And Qatadah, one of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, said,

His parents rejoiced when he was born and grieved for him when he was killed. If he had stayed alive, he would have been the cause of their doom. So let a man be content with the decree of Allah, for the decree of Allah for the believer, if he dislikes it, is better for him than if He were to decree something that he likes for him.

Furthermore, another interpreter points out that:

Allah knew that the future of this boy was that he would become a tyrant; therefore, the wisdom behind the birth of the boy could be that his father was destined for a higher rank in al-Jannah, in the event of his son's death. Perhaps Allah was to bless the parents of the boy with another more virtuous son. The son may have also been killed to provide a lesson to the youth. If this boy had lived, he would have been destined for hell, but his death at a young age meant he was destined to enter al-Jannah. Thus, his death was beneficial to the society, to his parents, and to himself.

Who among us are enlightened enough to accept this out of hand? Allah ﷻ forbid anything happens to our children.

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا
وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا
رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ...

WA AMMĀ-L-JIDĀRU FA-KĀNA LIGHULĀMAYNI
YATĪMAYNI FI-L-MADĪNATI WA KĀNA
TAHTAHU KAÑZUL-LAHUMĀ WA KĀNA
ABŪHUMĀ ŠĀLIHAN FA-ARĀDA RABBUKA AÑY-
YAB^ĀLUGHĀ ASHUDDAHUMĀ WA YASTAKHRIJĀ
KAÑZAHUMĀ RAHMATAM-MIR-RABBIKA...

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town, and beneath it was a [buried] treasure belonging to them. Their father was a righteous man, and your Lord intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. [18:82]

Al-Khidr عليه السلام concludes the teaching by showing that not only were his actions, which appeared to be wrong, were actually right, but they were not his actions at all, but the decrees of Allah ﷻ acted upon by

him because of his knowledge of the Unseen and from the Mercy of Allah ﷻ.

وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا

WA MĀ FA-[°]ALTUHU [°]AN AMRĪ DhĀLIKA TA'WĪLU
MĀ LAM TASTI[°] [°]ALAYHI ṢAB^āRĀ

And I did them not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of those (things) over which you could not be patient. [18:82]

Despite the fact that Musa ﷺ was a prophet, and he carried the Divine law from Allah ﷻ to humanity, it still did not give him the subtle knowledge known to one who has become the direct recipient and instrument of Allah ﷻ. Musa ﷺ is shown all these events, shown how Allah ﷻ responds to circumstances in order to benefit His creation, redirecting circumstances, using His servant as an instrument to accomplish his intended purpose. Through Khidr ﷺ, Musa ﷺ is given a lesson of the vast knowledge of Allah ﷻ: how subtle it is, how momentary it can be, how specific and also how universal; how you can see it in one moment and forget it in the next. As a prophet, Musa ﷺ is already wise, but the story of Musa ﷺ and Al-Khidr ﷺ tells us that even with wisdom, we don't understand every inner meaning.

LEARNING TO ACCEPT THE INNER MEANINGS

There are many things we can learn today from this story: some of them are about paradoxes, confusion, and chaos. What appears to be loss might be gain. What appears to be gain might be loss. What appears to be wealth might be eventually poverty. What appears to be poverty might be safety. What appears to be illness might lead to health. The momentary appearance of cruelty might be a mercy for a larger number of people. In other words, *Allaahu 'aalim* (Allah ﷻ knows best). Allah's ﷻ wisdom transcends all human capability for understanding. As many books as you can read or write, as many great philosophical ideas as you can have, as many interesting

discussions that you can have, if we don't have humility between every single word, and are not questioning our knowledge with every single word (instead of celebrating how great and brilliant you are), you are not only not seeing the Unseen, you are shutting yourself off from it; and though this life may be full for you, and you have many understandings and much wealth and much success, the Hereafter will be empty of meaning.

Knowledge of the Unseen, *‘ilm adh-dhaati*, is knowledge only accorded to Allah ﷻ. Allah ﷻ grants power and authority to certain of His servants for the purpose of benefiting the rest of His creation. Everything must benefit from Allah's ﷻ knowledge. Not just you, not just me, not just the people in *tareeqah*, not just the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews—but everything, the birds, the insects, the trees, everything. In the case of Musa ﷺ, Khidr's ﷺ knowledge of the Unseen was the source of many difficult lessons, lessons about his own self and abilities. Not just the lessons of those stories, but what about reflecting on what happened? Did anything ever happen to you that you didn't reflect on for hours, days, months, years, especially if it had to do with our self-image, or the idea of our own knowledge, lessons about our own self and abilities, and about the mystery and vastness of Allah's ﷻ intention?

We can learn from the knowledge that Al-Khidr ﷺ imparts, the secrets of the very delicate balance between patience, trust, and faith, and surrender. It is so easy to over-balance, to not see the linkages, not know when to pause, to be patient, to wait; hence, we have methods given to us for that purpose. We especially think of *muraaqabah* and *dhikru-Llāh*; contemplating Qur'an. We can learn from Musa ﷺ that knowledge cannot be taken for granted (assumed), and every act of ours, every question, every word, and hence every thought unuttered has a consequence. A stone thrown into a pond makes a ripple, not in one direction, but in every direction, in every aspect of our lives. We can understand from the *tafseer*, some of which I have already shared, the linkages that Musa ﷺ didn't see, because he was focused on the outer meaning rather than the unseen reality. Indeed, every time Musa's ﷺ attention goes from the inner journey he is on to the outer occurrences that Al-Khidr ﷺ instigates, he asks a question, which he is not supposed to

do. It becomes not only a trust issue, but an issue of attention. Once the attention is turned outward then doubt or questions rise. Then we find that inertia sets in, a kind of forgetfulness that is sometimes worse than action.

One of the greatest pitfalls to the spiritual path is torpor, laziness—when you can't get yourself to do something, where there is a lack of self-discipline to do *wudu'*, to pray, to study, to read Qur'an, to sit in *muraqabah*, to make *tabajjud* prayer, to make *istighfar*, to make *istikhaara*. When torpor or questioning becomes your pattern, it becomes your way of life and blocks your access to knowledge of the Unseen. Eventually, Musa ؑ comes to understand (or at least is told) the underlying intention of those events. But he pays a price, the price of not being aware in the moment. What is explained post facto is far from the same as being in a receptive and awakened state in the moment. He got the answer, but he didn't get it in the time frame he normally would have gotten it; consequently, it cannot possibly have the meaning that it would have if he was ready for it to arrive at the right time, if at all.

Khidr ؑ is living in *waqt* and seizes the moment because of the knowledge given by Allah ﷻ to him. But Musa ؑ, like most of us, is operating in *zaman*, linear time, the world of literal cause/effect, rather than insight and trust. Only after the explanations do we understand that what seems to be wrong in Al-Khidr's ؑ actions is right in Allah's ﷻ judgment. You could say, in a way, that Musa's ؑ encounter with Al-Khidr ؑ is somehow an encounter with the subtlest Attributes of Allah ﷻ in order that Allah ﷻ can equip Musa ؑ to overcome the assumptions that come with life in this world. It can also be seen as a test for Musa ؑ. But it certainly is an example of the fact that we human beings are always faced with the limits of our search for awareness, unity, union with, submission to Allah ﷻ, or humility before vast knowledge.

TRAVELING IN THE HOMELAND

The Sufi draws many practical lessons from the stories of Al-Khidr ؑ. Among these is the second principle of the Naqshbandiyya Order: *safar dar watani* / journeying in one's homeland. As I have said,

Al-Khidr ؑ is known as the Wanderer, the ever-traveling Dervish. When Musa ؑ wished to study with him, he had to travel to the place where he would meet him. And, rather than stay in one place as a student, he became Al-Khidr's ؑ traveling companion, traveling across the land and sea to the various circumstances that they encounter. There's an implication in the idea of travel that is a divergence from the common idea of living an ascetic life and being a spiritual individual. The outward journey through the world serves as a mirror for the traveler. There are a myriad of analogies and statements about the dimension of meditation, and the levels one goes through in each *lateefah*, and in each transmission, and how everything in the outer reflects the inner, and everything in the inner reflects the outer. This is a core of our teaching.

It is important, if you are a serious sojourner, to build the bridge between the outer and the inner life in a conscious and direct way, not just in thinking and speaking philosophically and being clever. By getting the taste/*dhanq* of it, by infusing your life with it, you gain so much knowledge that it becomes on the tip of your finger, or the tip of your tongue. You can then recognize the dimensions of meditation: *ghunoodgi* (drifting as in leaving the outer world), *adraak* (awareness of the altered state and station i.e., being conscious in one's meditation), and *wuruud* (being able to direct your inner travel and be conscious of your direction and perception).

In this journey in the world and on the path, you begin to see in your own self both the inner and the outer. You see that in the world around you there is a mirror to your journey. This life is actually about journeying in one's homeland. That homeland is your own inner world, your own inner self. Wherever you are in the outer world, it becomes a mirror for your inner state; so you are journeying in the inner world also. 'Journeying in the homeland' means realizing that what you are looking for is within you and around you in the most familiar places. That was a lesson for Musa ؑ. He searched far and long to find Al-Khidr ؑ and learns the secret knowledge from him. The lessons Al-Khidr ؑ teaches him are lessons about the refinement of his own inner self. His lack of patience and lack of knowledge can only be transformed by patience and inner reflection.

So Musa's ﷺ journey is a journey in his homeland. Journeying in one's homeland has two meanings. It means literally staying where you are geographically, and "digging your well in one place," as I like to tell my students. It also means turning inward and journeying in the most familiar place: your own self you are constantly aware of. The Prophet ﷺ said: *"May the mercy of Allah be upon us and upon Musa. If he had stayed with his companion, he would have seen wonders; but he said, 'If I ask you anything after this, keep me not in your company. You have received an excuse from me.'"* Did he need the excuse, or did Musa ﷺ need to give it? From this *hadith*, we can understand that if Musa ﷺ had continued to persevere in the journey in his "inner homeland," under the guidance of his teacher, and despite the challenges and difficulties, he would have achieved even greater depths of knowledge and understanding. But it was Allah's ﷻ Will that it was not to be that way. If knowledge and understanding were to come to him, it would come to him not through that source.

CHOOSING THE SPIRITUAL WAY

The first step on this inner journey to knowledge and understanding of the secrets of the unseen world is turning one's attention away from the pursuits of the outer and diving into the inner journey. In many stories and traditions, it is the voice of Al-Khidr ﷺ, the *hatif* (or invisible caller) that directs those with potential to remember the inner journey.

During a trip to Damascus with Ibrahim Ibn Adham, along with Yusef Ghusuli and Abdullah Sinjari, he asked Ibn Adham, "O Abu Ishaq! Tell me about your beginning in this matter (meaning Sufism), and how did it come to be?" He answered and said, "My father was King of Khorasan. When I was a young man, I used to go riding and hunting. One day, I went out with my dog on one of my horses. Having spotted the tracks of a rabbit or a fox, I started pursuing him. I heard a hatif (invisible caller) addressing me. It said, "O Ibrahim, is that what you were created for? Is that what you were commanded to do?"

I became frightened, and I stopped for a while. Then I urged my horse on to a gallop. And the hatif returned to me three times, repeating the same questions, until, at last I heard another hatif, this time coming from the

pommel of my saddle, saying, "By Allah, you were not created for this, nor was this what you were commanded to do." I descended from my horse, and chanced upon one of my father's shepherds tending his flock. I took his woolen robe from him, gave him my horse and all that I had, and I proceeded in the direction of Mecca.

As I was traveling in the desert towards Mecca, I met a man who was walking. He did not carry with him any food, any vessel, or any provisions. At sunset, he performed Maghrib prayer, and then moved his lips uttering words that I did not understand. A vessel with food in it and another with drink materialized in front of me. I ate and I drank. I remained with him in this manner for several days, during which he taught me the Supreme Name of Allah. He then disappeared, and I remained alone. After much time alone, I felt forsaken in my solitude. I called on Allah with the Supreme Name.

Suddenly, I was confronted with a man who grabbed me by the buckle of my belt. He said, "Ask and you will be given." I was frightened by his words, but he said, "Don't be afraid, no harm will come to you. I am your brother Al-Khidr ؑ. It was my brother Daoud who taught you the Supreme Name of Allah, but do not ever use it for du'aa/invocation against anyone, even if there is an enmity between the two of you, for you would cause his perdition in this world and the next. But do ask Allah to reinforce with it your cowardice, to strengthen with it your weakness, and to bestow upon you with it companionship in your solitude, and to renew every hour with it your desire for Him/Hu." With that, he departed and left me.

We hear in this story the theme I began with of calling on help from the Unseen. We hear also of the difficulty of the journey. The speaker, who had clearly already achieved great wisdom, called out to Allah ﷻ out of a feeling of being forsaken in solitude; yet, it was in his solitude that he found reliance on Allah ﷻ. As Ishaq al Balki reports, "My father related to me that he once asked Ibrahim Ibn Adham, 'Advise me.' He said, 'Take Allah as your companion, and leave people aside.'" We see from the story that it is not always easy to turn away from this world and toward the inner. The man in the story was a prince, surrounded by all the wealth and pleasures of this world, intent on riding and hunting. At first he fled from the voice of Al-Khidr ؑ,

from the voice saying “*By Allah, you were not created for this, nor was this what you were commanded to do.*”

How many of us, surrounded and immersed in the things of this world, have heard that voice, perhaps an almost inaudible whisper from deep inside of us, saying, “*By Allah, you were not created for this, nor was this what you were commanded to do*”? Maybe it was even when we tried to help someone who didn’t want the help, and we find out later. We are trying to serve a purpose that can’t be served. We want something that we want, but we don’t ask what Allah ﷻ wants for us. But somewhere there is that deep voice, whispering to us. Is that your voice, my voice? Whose voice is it? Maybe we know. Maybe if we are in *tareeqah*, we have been blessed with that voice. But we don’t know. It’s better to assume it is a possibility, than to assume it is not. If we have heard that voice, how many have answered its call in a way it should be answered? What does it take to answer that call, “to do what we are commanded to do”?

Ibrahim Ibn Adham said, “*Know that you will not reach the rank of salih^{een}, the blessed ones, until you cross six obstacles:*

1. *Close the door of ease, and open the door of difficulties.*
2. *Close the door of loftiness and grandeur, and open the door of humiliation.*
3. *Close the door of rest, and open the door of effort.*
4. *Close the door of sleep, and open the door of sleeplessness.*
5. *Close the door of wealth, and open the door of poverty.*
6. *Close the door of hope, and open the door of preparation for death.*

We are not going to get a piece of paper and rate ourselves on this—not today. But I guarantee, we will all rate ourselves eventually.

LESSONS FOR THE MUREED (Rules of Discipleship)

How do we begin to cross these obstacles (as Ibrahim Ibn Adham put it) on the journey? We need to strive to be in the presences of those who are wise and know more than us: the *shuyukh*. For Sufis and seekers on the Path, the story of Musa عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام has a very special importance. It is the model of one who seeks and follows a teacher. It holds many specific lessons on conduct for the

mureed, or would-be *mureed*. The conditions of conduct which are required, necessary even, for all of us *mureeds* have been stated in many different ways over the centuries. These conditions are numerous, but some of the most important ones are as follows.

1. Don't object in our hearts against any of the actions of our Shaykh, but try to find all the possible explanations for them. If we can't find an explanation, then attribute our doubt or any blame to our own lack of understanding, because this was the example of Musa عليه السلام and Khidr عليه السلام; or more specifically, this was the instruction that al-Khidr عليه السلام gave Musa عليه السلام. The path on which the Master leads his Disciple is full of mysteries and paradoxes. The Seeker, being unable to understand his Master's acts, falls into the weakness of questioning, and even doubting his Master, and then comes the torpor and the excuses. Sailing on the Divine Ocean is not always going to be a smooth ride. Allah ﷻ says in the Holy Qur'an:

وَنَبْلُوكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ
وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ. الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ
قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ.

WA LANAB^aLUWANNAKUM BISHAY'IM-MINA-L-
KhAWFI WA-L-JŪ'Ī WA NAQ^aSIM-MINA-L-
'AMWĀLI WA-L-'AÑFUSI WA-Th-ThAMARĀTI WA
BASHSHIRI-S-SĀBIRĪN. ALLADhĪNA IDhĀ
ASĀBAT'HUM MUṢĪBATUÑ QĀLŪ INNĀ LI-LLĀHI
WA'INNĀ ILAYHI RĀJĪ'ŪN.

Be sure, We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits of your toil, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity, "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return." [Surah al-Baqarah, 2:155-156]

The Seeker suffers worldly losses and endures difficulties, sometimes with doubt. The Seeker has been informed about the duality of the struggle: to endure trials or lose him or herself to the world. What

seems to him or her an unjust act is indeed an act of kindness. This is the way of the Master. Mawla Murtaza Ali has said: “*Never permit yourselves to have a doubt (in religion). As soon as you permit one to arise, you become unbelievers, deprived of the Mercy of Allah, because doubt is the feature of His enemies. So, let you always be firm in your religious opinion.*” And according to 17th century Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghani ibn Isma’il al-Nablusi: *Objection is most repulsive, and the one objecting is not excusable. The veil that results from objection has no cure; lifting it is very difficult, and it particularly results in blocking the channels of fayd (spiritual downpour, abundance) upon the mureed. So, brother, sister! Do avoid this irremediable ailment.*

It is very difficult to lift the veil. We see that Al-Khidr ؑ gave Musa ؑ three chances to “lift the veil of his objection” and he was not able to, because one of the things that block that light of *fayd* is objecting in the heart to the actions of the *shaykh*. The second condition of conduct for the *mureed* is as follows:

2. Disclose your thoughts to the *shaykh*, good or bad, so that he can treat you. The *shaykh* in this case is like a doctor who, when given the information about the state of mind or health, can give a prescription. You may ask, “But what about Musa ؑ? Wasn’t he following this instruction when he disclosed his thoughts to Al-Khidr ؑ?” The response to this is two-fold. First, he was countering a previous very clear instruction and agreement he made with his “*shaykh*”—to be patient and not to question. Second, even in his error, it was through his disclosing of his thoughts and questions that Khidr ؑ was able to treat and guide him, and that we are able to learn from his story centuries later, maybe 6,000 years later. And we are still learning from this story.

When one discloses his/her thoughts to the *shaykh*, with sincerity and humility, there is *tawajjuh*. What is really happening is that the *shaykh* is turning his attention towards Allah ﷻ in order to correct the error or the problem in the *mureed*, and then he turns his attention toward the *mureed*. So the student, especially one who has made some progress on the path, should be very careful not to rely just on his or her own *kashf* because that *kashf* can be tainted, colored, and mistaken.

3. Another instruction is **to be truthful in your seeking**. That means no matter what is afflicting you, no matter how tired you are, no matter how hard it is, no matter what is happening to you, even if you are reproached, even if you are frustrated, even if you are annoyed by situations, you don't allow it to diminish your seeking. It doesn't diminish your taking the time, even in the midst of all those difficulties, to sit in *muraqabah*, to pray, to read Qur'an, to study, to serve *fi sabili-Llāh*. In other words, don't fall into Shaytan's trap of using difficulties as an excuse to distract you away from the practices, which themselves will cure and liberate, if you can only stay true to them. You are not going to cure those ailments any other way. You are only going to cure those things by staying true to the practice. That is the prescription. You go to a doctor; he gives you a prescription. You take it or you don't. Sometimes, you get to not finish the prescription, like I did this week, but I got permission.

Again, we see the connection to the story of Musa ؑ, who initially missed the place where the two seas meet because he was tired and hungry from the long journey. How might his entire journey have been different had he maintained attention to the goal? Similarly, how might the story have been different if Musa ؑ was able to stay true to the "practice" he was given: to be patient and not question? But that was not the Will of Allah ﷻ, obviously. So, if there are things that disturb you, if there are things that bother you, if there are things that you don't understand, then turn towards them, rather than away from them. Turn towards love, towards our love for our *shaykh*, towards Allah; towards worshipping Allah, towards seeing that Divine Presence everywhere. Truth and understanding can rarely be achieved without the trials and vicissitudes and distractions. Unless and until we direct our attention away from the supposedly important things in the outer, we will not be able to turn ourselves toward what is truly important in the inner.

4. A fourth instruction is that **we are not to emulate the actions of the *shaykh*, but we are to take all the verbal suggestions, commands, orders in such a way that they should be obeyed, immediately**. You may see something in the outer and it looks like a fault, a flaw, something that is not understandable; but the knowledge behind that and the reason behind that might be so weighty that it

might crush you. This instruction again returns us to the story of Musa ﷺ and Khidr ﷺ. The teaching was not about emulating Khidr's ﷺ outer actions: sinking a boat, or killing an innocent boy, or building a wall. The teaching was the opposite: look beyond the external actions to accept the inner knowledge of the Unseen.

The second part of this instruction is that when we are told to do something by the *shaykh*, we should do it immediately, right away, and not get involved in trying to interpret what the *shaykh* says or does, or in trying to read the “spirit” of the instruction. If you want to disrupt your progress on the path, then don't follow the guidelines of the *shaykh*. Most often the guidelines are about attending *subhat*, reading Qur'an, sitting in *muraqabah*. Sometimes the instructions are about the way you act or even things that have to do with your worldly life to make you a better person.

As a carrier of knowledge and secrets, as a person who represents what the *shaykh* represents and what his *shaykh* represented, back to *Rasulu-Llaah* ﷺ, you respect him and honor him. You fill your heart with *dhikr*, because *dhikr* drives away the distractions, the forgetfulness of Allah, and the involuntary thoughts that often interfere with our prayer and our *dhikr*; because you, if you are in *tareeqah*, represent everyone, all the way back.

5. Also, you should be very careful about exposing your needs to anyone other than the *shaykh*. If the *shaykh* is not present, if there is no one representing him, then you might turn towards a righteous person, a generous person, a kind person, or a pious person for some advice. But this should be the last of the resorts, not the first. Why is that? Because the *shaykh* sees your *nafs*, sees you better than you see yourself. We know that Al-Khidr ﷺ saw Musa ﷺ with a clarity that no one else could. At their first meeting he says: **“Surely you will not be able to be patient with me.”** [18:67] But Musa ﷺ of course assures him that he will be.

The stranger doesn't see your *nafs* the way the *shaykh* does. Even another *shaykh* will not see what your *shaykh* sees about you. They may not take into consideration what you need, what you have been through, where you are in the journey, how you receive, how you

reject. How does a stranger know that? That is exactly the reason why, by the way, we go to strangers for advice. Because they can't reflect back on us all the things that we are trying to avoid seeing. Someone may give you a good answer to a good question, but it may not help you spiritually, because it is not taking into consideration your state of mind, your state of emotions, what you know.

6. Service to the *shaykh* and *tareeqah*, and the pursuit of knowledge must end in service to others and commitment to the future. The disciple learns to sacrifice personal gains for the good of others. Service to others represents a higher form of worship, helping to annihilate our *nafs ammaara*. The aspect of service is expressed in the words of the 48th Ismaili Imam, Hazrat Mawlana Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, who said:

Today, I will give you a small motto and that is 'Work, not Words.' Labor for the welfare of others is the best way of improving ourselves, because results are sure and certain. If you work for yourselves, you will never be happy.

It is in the act of service itself (repairing the wall, in the case of Khidr عليه السلام) without regard for reward that the teacher exemplifies this aspect of service. These are just some of the lessons that can be discussed when we study the stories of Al-Khidr عليه السلام. I have shared with you a very small part of the duties of the *mureed* to the *murshid*. And, indeed, there is much more, including the duties of the *murshid* to the *mureed*, but those are for another time.

CONCLUSION: CALLING THROUGH THE UNSEEN

I began today by reminding you that Al-Khidr عليه السلام is the first among the unseen beings and guides who are among us, guides and helpers who we are encouraged to call up on for help. I will end by returning to this instruction, as a practical and daily way we can open our self to the constant flow of knowledge and assistance of Allah ﷻ that is available, flowing to us. We may think that having a relationship to the unseen world is just for saints and mystics. But the truth is we all have a relationship with the unseen world, every day. If your tire goes flat, you say, "Oh, Allah! How am I going to fix this tire?" If you say

it in the right way, AAA comes faster than you thought it would come. While it's possible that the Angels come and hold the tire in place, it's more probable that a policeman or friendly face will come to aid you. But what we must remember is that in all the mechanisms (angels, police, or friend), Allah ﷻ is sending the assistance. Ibn Abi Shayba relates in his "Musannaf" from Aban ibn Salih that the Prophet ﷺ said: ***"If one of you loses his animal or his camel in a deserted land where there is no-one in sight, let him say: 'O servants of Allah, help me! (yâ ʿibâd Allâh aʿînûnî)', for verily he will be helped."***

That means we are always near to the door or tunnel (*majaaʿ*) to the unseen world. The key is to stay attentive, to not forget (as Musa ﷺ forgot) that that is what we are seeking. All we need to do is say, "As-salaamu alaykum, yaa Rasuulu-Llaah! We are sufferers, seeking your refuge. Help us," and the tunnel appears. In fact, there are stories from the companions of the Prophet ﷺ of his companions asking for his *madad* and his answering over great distances:

One night, the Prophet of Allah - may Allah bless him and grant him peace - was in his house and was heard to proclaim "I am here! (Labayk!)" three times, and "You have been granted help (Nusirta!)" also three times.

Umm al- Mu'minin, Maymunah - may Allah be well pleased with her - asked the Prophet - may Allah bless him and grant him peace - whom he had been talking to since there was no one present.

He replied, "I was talking to a person called Rajiʿ from the tribe of Bani Ka'ab. He asked for help from me against the Quraysh."

Umm al- Mu'minin, Maymunah - may Allah be well pleased with her - said that when she finished Fajr prayer the next morning, she heard Rajiʿ calling out in the streets of Madina: "Yaa Rasuulu-Llaah! Help us and call the servants of Allah to help us."

I'm sure we have all had some experience of knowledge or assistance coming from the Unseen. In the unseen world nothing is unseen there. Something comes to you in your *kashf*. It energizes you,

because you're in the flow of a river of knowledge that is always flowing. You are just walking down to the bank and dipping your hand in it, or jumping in it, or sipping from it, just like a thirsty person taking a drink of water. Everything is evidence of Allah's ﷻ immense and subtle knowledge—everything. It's either very prime evidence, like a tree, or a bush, fruit, dirt; or it's secondary evidence, like what has been constructed out of all of that, like a pen. What comes out of the pen/*qalam* is also evidence of the Divine Reality.

When a person can access any knowledge or information about any event or any circumstance or any person by their will, this state is called *shahud*. In this state, you can see anything in the universe. You can hear things anywhere. You can smell things anywhere in the universe. You can touch things anywhere in the universe. The highest point of *shahud* is *fat-h*, an opening. At that stage, a person is free from space and time. They can see, hear, touch, smell, and feel anything present anywhere in time and space. It is as if you are being absorbed into a state, and then you become what we call *insaani-kaamil*. This is the permanent station of Al-Khidr ؑ, to whom Allah ﷻ taught knowledge directly from His Presence. That stage, even though it might be a momentary stage—and certainly most people never get to that stage; most Sufis never get to that stage—is a stage waiting for us in the *ghayb*. *Insha'a-Llah*, we earn it in this world for the Jannah.

We can achieve the entrance to that state in this world by our sincerity, and by our piety, and by our patience, if it is the Will of Allah ﷻ. That is the spiritual journey toward Allah, *sayr ilaa-Llaah*. You are on it from the first day you walked this path or any path. My Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasool, called it the Search of Truth. It is the search for knowledge of the Unseen, for guidance from beyond, for Peace, for Understanding, for Compassion. Like the Wandering Dervish, we gratefully accept whatever assistance, knowledge, or mercy we can find along the way. We continue our journey with patience and perseverance, with humble acceptance of the vast oceans of unseen knowledge that surround us. And we pray for a taste of the knowledge of those, like Al-Khidr ؑ, who have been granted True Wisdom from the Water of Life.

My dear friends, as you can see, we can only touch on these subjects. There is so much to know. It should just inspire us to seek, and not to be upset when we don't understand—we are in good company. Not to be too upset when we can't follow the promise that we made, but to repent of it—we are in good company. Not to hurt ourselves mentally or emotionally if we ask the wrong question, because we are in good company. But we should never use that good company as an excuse not to try harder. If we can, we should say, with humility and gratitude, that we are in the company of those of *tareeqah*, of the *ambiyaa'*, and of the *awliyyaa' Allah*. The story of *waliyat* is very important to understand. All of us have to set the standard high, and good intentions are most important. Our expectations must be tempered. When we don't get what we ask for, or we don't understand something, then seek humility and gratitude. Understand that, of course, we can say it is all by the Will of Allah. But the Will of Allah ﷻ is that we make effort. That we know; otherwise, there would be no *fard*, no *sunnah*, and no *naafil*. There would be no *ambiyaa'*, teaching, no *awliyyaa' Allah*, nothing. Why? Just say, it's the Will of Allah ﷻ; that's it. We don't need anyone else.

This is the discussion between *shareeah* and *tareeqah*, between the world of rules and the Path, between the exoteric and the esoteric. Keep yourself involved in the journey, because there are all kinds of excuses—"I'm busy. There's this; there's that"—and stay in *subhat*. The value of *subhat* is very important; but it is not a social thing, like going to a *halqah* and reading Qur'an together and then you leave. That's good, *alhamdulillah*. It's better than sitting at home watching TV. "Can we adjust the *halqah* schedule this week around the football game?" "Sure, we can push it back by half an hour, and watch the game, and then go sit in meditation." It's like learning how to stop texting. Until you try to stop, you don't know how addicted you are to it. Please take it all very seriously, *insha'a-Llah*. I pray that I take it more seriously, and that you take it more seriously, *insha'a-Llah*.

CLOSING DU^{AA}

(Prayer for meeting Al-Khidr)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ يَا حَنَانَ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ
يَا مَنَانَ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ يَا دَيَانَ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ يَا صُبْحَانَ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ
يَا بُرْهَانَ الْأَمَانَ الْأَمَانَ مِنْ فِتْنَةِ الزَّمَانِ وَجَفَاءِ الْإِخْوَانِ وَشَرِّ الشَّيْطَانِ
وَوُظْلَمِ السُّلْطَانِ بِفَضْلِكَ يَا رَحِيمُ يَا رَحْمَانُ يَا ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ
وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى خَيْرِ خَلْقِهِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ
الرَّاحِمِينَ

Bismi-Llaahir-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Bismi-Llaah al Amaan al Amaan

Yaa Hanaan al Amaan al Amaan

Yaa Manaan al Amaan al Amaan

Yaa Dayaan al Amaan al Amaan

Yaa Subhaan al Amaan al Amaan

Yaa Burhaan al Amaan al Amaan

Min fitnati-z-zamaani, wa jafaa'i-l-ikhwaan

Wa sharri-sh-Shaitan, wa dhulmi-s-sultaan

Bi fadlika, yaa Raheem yaa Rahman

Yaa dha-l-Jalaali wa-l-ikraam

Wa salla-Llaahu 'alaa khayri khaliqihi

Muhammadin wa aalihi wa as-haabihi ajma'een

Bi-Rahmatika, yaa Arhaama-r-Rahimeen

The manner of Shaykh ‘Abd al- Qadir’s (may Allah sanctify his innermost being) salutation [salaam] to the men of the Unseen [rijal al-Ghaib] (sanctified be their innermost beings).

Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim.

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

As-salamu ‘alaykum ya rijalal-Ghaib

Peace be upon you, O men of the Unseen! .

As-salamu ‘alaykum ya ayyuhal-arwahul-mutaqaddasa.

Peace be upon you, O sanctified spirits!

Ya nuqaba ya nujaba ya ruqaba ya budala!

O presidents, O noblemen, O overseers, O spiritual deputies!

Ya awtadal-ardi awtadun arba’a: ya imaman!

O mainstays of the earth, four mainstays! O two leaders!

Ya Qutbu ya fardu ya umana!

O Cardinal Pole! O matchless individual! O trustees!

Aghithu-ni bi-ghawthatin wa ‘nduru-ni bi-nadratin.

Provide me with assistance. Look on me with favor.

Warhamu-ni wa hassilu muradi wa maqsudi,

Treat me with compassion. Fulfill my wish and my objective.

Wa qumu ‘ala qada’i hawa’iji

And attend to the satisfaction of my needs

‘inda Nabiyyi-na Muhammadin (salla ‘llahu ‘alai-hi wa sallam).

in the presence of our Prophet Muhammad.

Sallama-kumu-Llaahu (ta‘ala) fid-dunya wal-akhira.

May Allah ﷻ grant you peace in this world and the Hereafter.

Allahumma salli ‘alal-Khidr.

O Allah, bestow blessings on Al-Khidr!